

# STAYING ACTIVE AS YOU AGE

INFORMATION FOR OLDER ADULTS, FAMILIES,  
AND CAREGIVERS



## READ THIS PAMPHLET TO LEARN:

- Why Physical Activity is Important.
- What Exercises are Appropriate for You.
- How to Start Exercising.



**Sinai  
Health**

Healthy Ageing  
and Geriatrics



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## WHY IS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IMPORTANT AS WE AGE?

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Physical activity and regular exercise contribute enormously to physical health and the ability to function normally. This is true throughout the life cycle, but is particularly true for older adults.

After about age 40, we begin to lose muscle mass. Muscles keep us strong, balanced and able to live independently.

Bone density also decreases with age, often leading to bones becoming more fragile and brittle. Weight-bearing exercise and strength training cause bones to work harder, helping to strengthen them.

Joint problems among older adults often involve osteoarthritis. The cartilage that separates bone ends in our joints can wear thin, limiting movement and causing pain. Exercises for range of motion, flexibility, endurance and strength can help offset the lack of movement related to joint pain.

Balance problems contribute to falls—it's estimated that over 1/3 of those over age 65 fall each year, contributing to hip fractures that are a major cause of surgery and reduced mobility among older adults. Balance and strength exercises can improve stability.

Physical activity can improve cognitive function by promoting blood circulation and releasing hormones that help sustain brain activity. It also helps combat depression and anxiety through the release of serotonin in the brain.

## MOVEMENT IS MEDICINE

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Every move counts towards better health. Being active for as little as half an hour a day has been proven to benefit older adults. Some chronic health conditions can be prevented or managed by regular exercise. Exercise can also help:

- Prevent chronic disease and premature death.
- Maintain independence.
- Enhance and maintain mobility.
- Improve or maintain body weight.
- Sustain strong bones and muscles.
- Promote mental health and well-being.

# WHAT KINDS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SHOULD YOU DO AND HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU DO THEM?

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The best kind of exercise is one you enjoy. However, some exercises address different areas of physical function. Talk to your health care provider to help determine the best exercise program for you.



**Regular weight-bearing exercises** can help you increase walking speed, improve leg strength and promote balance, resulting in fewer falls, better weight control, improved mobility and higher levels of vitality.



**Strength or resistance training** can help counter common problems such as arthritis, diabetes, obesity, back pain and depression.



**Aerobic exercises** increase heart rate and breathing, which can help promote physical function and mobility.



**Flexibility and balancing exercises** improve balance and reduce the risk of falls.

## HOW MUCH EXERCISE SHOULD YOU GET EACH WEEK?

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It is recommended that Canadians of all ages, including older adults, get at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity, aerobic physical activity per week.

Here are some clues to help you gauge your exercise intensity:

**Moderate exercise:** Your breath speeds up but you are not out of breath, you develop a light sweat after 10 minutes of activity, and you can carry on a conversation but can't sing.

**Vigorous exercise:** Your breath is deep and rapid, you develop a sweat only after a few minutes of activity, and it is difficult to say more than a few words.

# WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF EXERCISE FOR OLDER ADULTS?

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Exercise can help manage chronic health conditions that older adults commonly face. Physical activity can also help older adults remain independent. If you begin to experience functional decline, starting an exercise program can help take back control.

Here are a few benefits of exercising for older adults:

**Falls** - Regular exercise strengthens muscles, builds muscle mass, improves balance, and enhances flexibility, all of which help reduce the risk of a fall, as well as easing the burden of a fall if it happens.

**Type 2 Diabetes** - Regular exercise uses sugar stored in the blood. Exercise—even a short walk—after meals can help reduce excess blood sugar and manage the effects of the disease.

**Heart Disease** - The heart is a muscle that benefits from and is strengthened by exercise, but some forms of heavy activity can be dangerous, especially after heart surgery. Cardiac rehabilitation programs are often individually designed and monitored; ask your health care provider if your condition warrants a referral to such a program.

**Back Pain** - Exercise, such as walking and stretching, can help address back pain, which is common in older adults.

Exercise can help manage many other conditions, including osteoporosis, arthritis, asthma, emphysema, obesity and cancer.

Exercise can also:

- Improve bone and muscle strength.
- Enhance mobility and reduce awkward movements, muscle strain, falls and fractures.
- Enhance brain power by increasing serotonin levels in the brain, which leads to improved focus and clarity, and reduce cognitive decline.
- Manage depression and anxiety by reducing levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline.

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

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### EXERCISE IS MEDICINE CANADA

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Exercise is Medicine Canada is a movement to encourage a healthy lifestyle among Canadians. Its programs are based on promoting exercises to reduce the risk of chronic disease.



[www.exerciseismedicine.org/canada](http://www.exerciseismedicine.org/canada)

### CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGY - EXERCISE GUIDELINES FOR OLDER ADULTS

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The Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) recommends older adults engage in 150 minute of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week. It also suggests activities older adults can participate in to meet the goal of 150 minutes per week.



[www.csepguidelines.ca/adults-65](http://www.csepguidelines.ca/adults-65)

### MY ACTIVE INGREDIENT

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My Active Ingredient is a peer-to-peer online healthcare hub on physical activity and health where patients, care providers, and the public can share their favourite 'movement hacks' and successes.



<https://www.myactiveingredient.org/resources?category=Older%20Adults>

## RELEVANT RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES

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- Living Longer, Living Well - Your Guide to Healthy Ageing
- Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
- Preventing Falls at Home

### **ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:**

- Advance Care Planning: How to Start the Conversation
- Alcohol and Your Health
- General Tips for Memory Problems
- Improving Urinary Incontinence
- Managing Caregiver Stress
- Managing Chronic Pain
- Managing Common Mental Health Conditions in Older Adults
- Managing Constipation
- Managing Mild Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer's Disease And Other Dementias
- Managing Multiple Chronic Health Conditions
- Managing Sedative-Hypnotic Use Among Older Adults
- Managing Sleep in Older Adults
- Managing Substance Use and Addictive Disorders As You Age
- Recognizing and Managing Anxiety
- Recognizing and Managing Depression
- Recognizing and Managing Delirium
- Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
- Safe Medication Use for Older Adults
- Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney
- Understanding Your Palliative Care Options

### **ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:**

- Community Transportation Options
- Driving Assessment Services
- Elder Abuse
- Funding for Mobility and Other Aids from the Assistive Devices Program
- Housing Options for Older Adults
- How to Register for Wheel-Trans
- Meals on Wheels

Visit [www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation](http://www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation) for additional resources for older adults, families and caregivers.

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**We would like to thank the following for their support of our Education Resources to Support Healthy Ageing Initiative:**



The Ben and  
Hilda Katz  
Foundation



Mon Sheong Foundation and the Ben and Hilda Katz Foundation have generously provided funding to support printing and translation of our Education Resources to Support Healthy Ageing.

The Ministry of Seniors Affairs and Accessibility supported this initiative with funding through its Seniors Community Grant Program.

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Modified: 07/2022